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TO ALL SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE ALUMNAE, PARENTS, AND FRIENDS:

In 1956, Sweet Briar College will celebrate its Golden Anniversary.

As we look ahead and make careful plans for Sweet Briar's second half-century as a leading college for women, it is appropriate that we take time to review the splendid progress Sweet Briar has made since 1906.

The members of the development committee are, therefore, highly pleased to distribute to all members of the Sweet Briar family this reprint of a magazine article that tells the story of Sweet Briar's first half-century. We are especially pleased to share it with you since it was written by an alumna who is a past president of our Alumnae Association.

Mrs. W. L. LYONS BROWN (Sara Shallenberger, '32)
Chairman, Sweet Briar Development Committee

Sweet Briar College

THE FIRST HALF CENTURY

By MARTHA VON BRIESEN, Director of Public Relations, Sweet Briar College

IN September, 1953, Sweet Briar College will open its doors for the beginning of its forty-eighth academic session as a liberal arts college. The college today is a very different place from that of 1906, when the first handful of students presented themselves for enrollment. Theirs was the spirit of pioneers, a spirit which they shared with the first president, the first faculty members, and the board of directors. They all felt the excitement of beginning a new venture in education for

women. Today, after years of growth and change, the college retains its essential forward-looking character, formulated so long ago.

Without a doubt, Sweet Briar's greatest charm still lies in the serene beauty of the campus, which the passing years seem only to enhance. So much apparent loveliness is apt to mislead the casual observer into overlooking the inherently dynamic life of the college. In spite of the fact that its setting is no longer remotely rural,

thanks to modern means of transportation, the feeling of a closely knit community, based on common interests approached from many points of view, remains strong and vital. Friendly informality is still the characteristic most quickly noticed by strangers, who may not be immediately aware that it is an indication of the free give-and-take in student-faculty relations which is cherished by both groups.

Sweet Briar's story begins almost one hundred years before the college came into being. In 1810, a young man named Elijah Fletcher, a graduate of the University of Vermont, came to Amherst County to teach at New Glasgow Academy. Three years later, he married Maria Antoinette Crawford, daughter of a wealthy land-owner whose home, Tusculum, was near New Glasgow. It is not definitely known when Fletcher gave up his teaching to become a business man and farmer, but by 1820 he had acquired much of the land which now belongs to the college. Local legend relates that it was Mrs. Fletcher, inspired by its abundance of wild roses, who named the property Sweet Briar.

Apparently the Fletchers used Sweet Briar for a summer residence, for they lived in Lynchburg until 1841, when Mr. Fletcher sold "The Virginian," at that time Lynchburg's only daily newspaper. The old farmhouse at Sweet Briar was enlarged by the addition of two wings, each with a square three-story tower. An arched portico was also added to the front of the house. The Fletchers had already planted much of the extensive boxwood garden which surrounds Sweet Briar House and which contributes so much to the fame of the place today.

Indiana, the elder daughter, inherited Sweet Briar after her father's death in 1858. She later married the Reverend James Henry Williams, an Episcopal clergyman, and in 1867 their only child, Maria, was born. Daisy, as she was always called, spent much of her brief life at Sweet Briar. Her love for the rolling fields, the shady woodlands, and the distant blue hills is everywhere apparent in the entries she made in her diary during the two years preceding her death in 1884.

Daisy's parents, stricken by her untimely death, soon began to think about a permanent memorial to their child. When Mr. Williams died in 1889, he left all of his property to his wife and his will expressed the hope that an educational foundation might eventually be established in memory of Daisy.

During the last ten years of her life, Mrs. Williams must have spent much time and thought in planning the outlines of the foundation. She had outlived all the members of her immediate family, and in her loneliness she withdrew almost completely from the activities which had formerly taken her away from Sweet Briar. She died in October, 1900, and within a few days was



The last of the log cabins of the Sweet Briar Plantation. The cabin is now used as an oratory.

buried in the hilltop cemetery beside her husband, her parents, her sister, and her only daughter.

When Mrs. Williams's will was published in November, 1900, the extent and wisdom of her planning became evident. Her intentions can best be understood by a reading of the will, particularly those sections which pertain to the projected institution. Specifically, she said, "I direct the said trustees forthwith after my decease to procure the incorporation in the state of Virginia of a corporation to be called the 'Sweet Briar Institute' The said corporation shall with suitable dispatch establish, and shall maintain and carry on upon the said plantation, a school or seminary for the education of white girls and young women

"It shall be the general scope and object of the school to impart to its students such education in sound learning, and such physical, moral and religious training as shall, in the judgment of the directors, best fit them to be useful members of society

"I desire that the school shall be made self-supporting, so far as practicable; but it is my hope that the board of directors may be able, from the income placed at their disposal, to establish scholarships affording tuition and maintenance for a limited number of deserving students, which scholarships shall be awarded under such rules and regulations as the board may prescribe"

In concluding this remarkable document, Mrs. Williams stated: "This bequest, devise and foundation are made in fulfillment of my own desire, and of the especial request of my late husband, James Henry Williams, solemnly conveyed to me by his last will and testament, for the establishment of a perpetual memorial of our deceased daughter, Daisy Williams."

To confirm this high purpose, Mrs. Williams left the bulk of her fortune. She left more than eight thousand acres of land, including some property in Lynchburg and in Amherst County in addition to what she referred to as the "Sweet Briar Plantation," and personal prop-

erty which totaled more than half a million dollars after certain specific bequests were taken care of.

The four original trustees of the will set out immediately to follow her instructions. These men, the Right Reverend A. M. Randolph, Episcopal Bishop of Southern Virginia, the Reverend T. M. Carson of Lynchburg, the Reverend Arthur P. Gray of Amherst, and Stephen Harding of Amherst County, secured the charter of incorporation from the state legislature in February, 1901. They added three more men to round out the first Board of Directors: the Reverend Carl E. Grammer, then of Norfolk and later of Philadelphia; Dr. John M. McBryde, president of Virginia Polytechnic Institute; and Judge Legh R. Watts of Portsmouth.

The first Board of Directors was apparently fired by the same determination which had inspired Mrs. Williams. With such a romantic name, setting and origin, the school might easily have become a pleasant finishing school. Instead, the Board chose a course of action which reflected the spirit of the new century and which was already evident in the progress made by the older women's colleges. At their first meeting, these men stated that "it is the declared wish and purpose of its Board of Directors to give such shape and scope to Sweet Briar Institute as will make it a worthy monument to the liberality of its founder and the first among the establishments for female education in the state and the south." The four clergymen and three laymen also decided that the institution should be "free from denominational control, but distinctly religious in character" and that it should maintain the highest college standards, uniting classical and modern ideals of education. Having set up the outline of the Institute, they were wise enough to leave the actual contents of the curriculum to the teachers and administrators who were to come. The directors did not forget Mrs. Williams's



This view of the dignified hallway of Sweet Briar House was taken before the fire of 1927.

wishes on the matter of scholarships. They promptly made provision that any girl who lived in Amherst County and who could meet the entrance requirements on the same basis with other applicants should be given free tuition. This provision is still in effect, and over the years, several hundred Amherst County residents have attended Sweet Briar at very little expense.

Five years passed between the granting of the charter and the opening of the college. In 1903, the Directors authorized contracts for the construction of the first



The gracious facade of Sweet Briar House, now used as the President's residence.



Mary Kendrick Benedict, first President of Sweet Briar College, 1906-1916.

buildings, in accordance with the plans of the architects, Cram and Ferguson, of Boston. At the same time, roads were built, water and sewage systems were installed, a power plant was erected to provide heat and electricity, and a stream was dammed to provide an adequate water supply. The bricks for the original buildings were fired on the grounds, their color and texture blending with the red soil of the region. By the spring of 1906, the physical plant was nearing completion. It consisted of a class room building, Academic, which also housed the chapel, assembly hall, and library; the Refectory; two dormitories, named for Mr. Gray and Mr. Carson; and four



One of the college's earliest means of transportation, the stage met trains at Sweet Briar Station.



Class Day at Sweet Briar in 1910.

faculty houses. Faculty, staff, and students were still needed to bring the college to life.

That same spring, the directors named Dr. Mary K. Benedict, a graduate of Vassar and of Yale, as the first president of the institution. According to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Dr. Benedict "had the honor to be the only woman president of a college of higher education in Virginia, if not in the south." Dr. Benedict arrived in early June to face an almost overwhelming task. Furnishings and equipment had to be ordered for the unfinished buildings, the curriculum had to be planned, a faculty and staff obtained, and countless details had to be cleared up quickly if the college was to open in September, as the directors hoped and expected. Last, but not least, there must be students.

Only one girl, Lillian Lloyd of Lynchburg, was on the rolls in June, but on the opening day there were fifty-one, of whom fifteen were day students. The faculty numbered eleven, the staff four. During that first



Skaters enjoying the Sweet Briar Lake in 1912.



Basketball is still popular at Sweet Briar, but the costumes have changed slightly.

► The class of 1919 posed for this photograph with high hopes, for at the time they were but freshmen.

Academic year, the Colored Association, the Christian Association, the dramatic and music clubs, and many other student organizations were started. Most important of all, student government was established under a charter granted by the family. When spring came, the first of the famous Sweet Briar May Day celebrations was held in the Boxwood Garden, with the spectators gathered on the front porch of the old plantation house, and Mrs. Williams's peacock strutting on the lawn.

The problems of the young college were many. By the time the doors had opened for the first year, almost all of Mrs. Williams's original bequests had been expended on the physical plant. In order to make both ends meet, the college had to rely on student fees. These were lean years, during the first decade when all but the stoutest hearts must have been ready to admit defeat. Among those who stood firm throughout the years was William B. Dew, treasurer of the college from 1906 to 1942, who guided the college's financial affairs with great care and foresight through three administrations. Many others who shared the burdens of those early years earned the underlying gratitude of those who later succeeded them.

All of these pioneers looked to the tall, serene, determined young woman who headed the institution. Al-



though only thirty-one years old, Miss Benedict had a maturity of outlook which far exceeded her years. She had a vision of the future of Sweet Briar, and she expended every effort towards the realization of that vision. She shared the joys and sorrows, the aspirations and discouragements of all, serving not only as president, but also as dean, counselor, and registrar. The rare combination of qualities which were embodied in this first president left their mark on the young institution.

One point on which all were agreed was that the academic standards must be of high quality. This posed some problems in the early days because relatively few students could meet the entrance requirements. The college refused to lower its standards. In order to overcome this difficulty, the college offered sub-freshman courses for those who were not yet ready for the normal



This peacock, owned by Indiana Fletcher Williams, roamed the campus for many years after the death of his mistress.



This historical marker is situated on Route 29 at the entrance to the college.



Emilie Watts McVea, Sweet Briar's second President, 1916-1925.

curriculum. This Academy, as it was later called, was closed in 1919.

June, 1910, brought Sweet Briar's first commencement. Five proud and happy young women received the college's first bachelor of arts degrees, modeled after Elijah Fletcher's 1810 diploma from Vermont. Sweet Briar's degree was soon recognized by the graduate schools of Columbia, Yale, Cornell, and other universities.

In 1916, Miss Benedict resigned to continue the study of medicine at Johns Hopkins, thus terminating an era

at Sweet Briar. During that first decade, three more dormitories had been built. Like Gray and Carson, they were named for directors: Randolph, Manson, and Carl Grammer. The student body and the faculty had increased, and seven classes had been graduated.

Dr. Emilie Watts McVea, who had been Dean of Women at the University of Cincinnati, became the second president. Hers was the task of guiding Sweet Briar through the difficult years of the first world war and the post-war period. Miss McVea was a talented speaker. Wherever she went, she won new friends for Sweet Briar. She initiated monthly discussion groups at Sweet Briar House for the women of Amherst County, who traveled in buggies and carriages over the precarious red dirt roads to attend these meetings. In 1922, Miss McVea organized the first Amherst County Day, now an annual event in the spring when the college plays host to young and old in Amherst County.

Frail health forced Miss McVea to resign in 1925. Her administration had seen Sweet Briar recognized by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, the American Council on Education, the American Association of University Women, and the Association of American Universities. During that time, several additions to the physical plant were also made: four more faculty houses, the infirmary, Boxwood Inn, and Fletcher, built to provide more classroom space and room for the administrative offices, formerly located in Sweet Briar House. The sixth dormitory, named for Fergus Reid of Norfolk made it possible to increase the student body to 450.

Miss McVea was succeeded by Dr. Meta Glass, member of a distinguished Lynchburg family and a graduate of Randolph-Macon Woman's College. Miss Glass held a doctorate from Columbia University where she was engaged in administrative work when she accepted the appointment as the third president of Sweet Briar College.

For twenty-one years Miss Glass directed the course of the college. To strengthen the academic program,

THE BOXWOOD CIRCLE

In front of Sweet Briar House stands the wide, curving Boxwood Circle. This majestic arrangement is famed for and wide as one of the most distinctive features of the boxwood plantings which surround the old house and gardens. The circle itself is comprised of thirty-one bushes which rise about twelve feet above the ground. All in all, there are about four hundred boxwoods on the grounds. It is generally agreed that the Boxwood Circle must have been planted about one hundred and thirty years ago because of the maturity and size of the magnificent bushes. It is also agreed that all of the boxwood around Sweet Briar House came from Kew Gardens in London.





Meta Glass, third President of the college, 1925-1946.

she increased the endowment from \$133,000 to almost \$1,000,000. During her administration, several new buildings were added to the already imposing campus, and noteworthy revisions in the academic program were accomplished. Early in the thirties, several new departmental and interdepartmental major programs were initiated, as well as the honors plan of study, participation in the University of Delaware's Junior Year Abroad, and a special program for the junior year at St. Andrews University in Scotland.

In addition to the construction of the Daisy Williams Gymnasium, the Book Shop, a faculty apartment house, the indoor riding ring, the outing cabin on Paul's Mountain, the new boat house, and several faculty houses, Miss Glass's administration saw the building of the Mary Helen Cochran Library. This magnificent gift



The spacious main reading room of the Mary Helen Cochran Library.

of Mr. Reid, which bears the name of his mother, dates from 1929, and was the answer to Sweet Briar's greatest need. As the library's collection has expanded, so has the depth and breadth of Sweet Briar's curriculum. During the past 23 years, the collection has grown from 19,000 volumes to more than 78,500. How well it serves the needs of the college is aptly demonstrated by the fact that over 21,000 books were circulated in 1952.

Grants from the Carnegie Corporation made possible major programs of study in both music and art. The



The facade of the Mary Helen Cochran Library, opened in 1929.



Martha B. Lucas, fourth President of Sweet Briar College, 1946-1950.

academic program was further strengthened by the establishment of the Carter Glass chair of government, the addition of several scholarship endowments, and the inauguration of sabbatical leaves and a retirement plan for faculty members.

Miss Glass served twice as president of the American Association of University Women. She was also president of the Association of American Colleges, and of the Association of Virginia Colleges. Honorary degrees were conferred upon her by several leading colleges and universities.

In 1946, Dr. Martha B. Lucas, a graduate of Goucher College and of the University of London, became the fourth president of Sweet Briar. Her administration was marked by increased interest in Sweet Briar's role in promoting international understanding. Several Sweet Briar students were named as delegates to conferences in England, Germany, and Scandinavia; others joined summer work camps in France and Germany. Sweet Briar offered more scholarships to foreign students. Miss Lucas herself was a delegate to the fourth UNESCO conference in Paris in 1949.



Student waitresses at work in the Refectory.



Foreign students at Sweet Briar during the current academic year represent (from left) Scotland, Austria, China, Denmark, and France.

Starting in 1948, Sweet Briar began its administration of the Junior Year in France. Now in its fifth year under Sweet Briar's auspices, the program has opened doors to international understanding for almost four hundred young men and women from eighty American colleges and universities.

Sweet Briar's reputation in academic circles was confirmed in 1949 by the Phi Beta Kappa Society. A charter was conferred which established the Theta of Virginia chapter at the college. Along with the first group of undergraduates, ten outstanding alumnae from the classes preceding 1940 were selected for membership.

The current phase of Sweet Briar's continuing progress started in 1950 when Dr. Anne Gary Pannell became the fifth president of the college. Mrs. Pannell is a graduate of Barnard College and holds her doctorate in history from Oxford University. She has carried



The 1951 group of students from all over the United States embarking for their Junior Year in France under the auspices of Sweet Briar College.



Anne Gary Pannell, fifth President of Sweet Briar College, with sons Gary and Clifton.

Sweet Briar's name far and wide, as she is in great demand as a speaker. Her personal charm and friendliness and her deep conviction regarding the essential values of the liberal education as exemplified at Sweet Briar have combined to win many new friends for the college. Mrs. Pannell has gone forward with Sweet Briar's many-sided efforts to promote international understanding. She is currently serving as international relations chairman for the American Association of University Women. In the past five years she has addressed conferences in Canada, Switzerland, Holland, and Italy.

The college's connections with other countries have also been strengthened in recent years by student ex-



The boathouse on Sweet Briar Lake where students swim, fish, go boating and enjoy picnics and outings.



The College Council, composed of students and faculty, in one of its regularly scheduled meetings. Topics of community interest and changes in student regulations are the Council's chief concerns.

changes and by the addition to the faculty of men and women who are natives of other lands. In the last decade, two Chinese students and an Indian student have been graduated from the college. Last June, the first Viet Name student, previously elected to Phi Beta Kappa, received a Sweet Briar degree, *magna cum laude*. Since the war, girls from France, Germany, Finland, Holland, Spain and Japan have held scholarships



A zoology laboratory class in Academic Hall under the guidance of Professor Jane Belcher.

at Sweet Briar. During the current year, their numbers have been augmented by students from Austria, France and Denmark, and this year, the third girl from St. Andrews University is attending the college.

Student interest in these programs is very strong. For the past seven years, two all-expense scholarships each year have been provided from proceeds of the annual community drive for funds conducted by the students. Five years ago, the students began to work for a



The rolling countryside is ideal for the regular drag hunts of the Sweet Briar Hunt.



St. Paul's Mission School at Bear Mountain, where Sweet Briar students have long done volunteer work with the children.

D. P. scholarship. By eating a "meager meal" once a week throughout the academic terms, they raised enough money in two years to grant the scholarship. It was held by a German girl who majored in sociology and completed her course in 1952.

While active in international affairs, Sweet Briar students have also been active in those near home. Since the earliest years, they have maintained a regular program of volunteer service at St. Paul's Mission School and in several small county public schools. They have cooperated with local citizens in starting various recreation projects for young people, through the county welfare agency. Continuing a custom of many years standing, a student serves on the Amherst County Health and Welfare Council, successor to the Amherst County Health Association which Sweet Briar faculty members helped to organize more than thirty years ago.

Young women from all over the country continue to come to Sweet Briar. They come in almost equal num-



Some classes, such as this music listening hour, are student-monitored.

bers from south and north, from public and from private schools. The class of 1952, the largest class ever graduated from Sweet Briar, had ninety-six members. They came from twenty-four states, the District of Columbia, three foreign countries, and Hawaii. Virginia had the largest representation with fifteen members. Seventeen seniors chose English as their major field, eleven chose religion, eleven government, seven sociology, six history, and four political economy, one of the interdepartmental majors now being offered.

It has often been said that all education is "unfinished business." The belief is strong at Sweet Briar that the best college education is that which stimulates its participants to continue to extend their mental growth. Further, the college believes that a "liberal" education, one which truly liberates the mind and spirit in the best sense of the word, is more than ever the best basic equipment for young women who will be called upon to adapt themselves to countless unforeseen situations in their future lives.

Sweet Briar, while remaining steadfast to its principles as a liberal arts college, has made many changes in its curriculum in attempting to meet the changing needs of its students. The students, too, have changed considerably over the years. It is true that they have retained many of the old traditions dear to earlier generations of students. May Day, step-singing, Lantern



Small classes allow more time for individual attention. Here, a creative writing workshop meets with the professor, Mrs. Evelyn Eaton.



The lighter side—the annual baseball game between two student organizations and their dates usually turns out to be something that Abner Doubleday would never have recognized.



The Daisy Williams Gymnasium, completed in 1931, was financed by student contributions from 1922 through 1931.

Night and many other occasions are still observed with mingled joy and nostalgia, but at the same time, the students have taken a much more important role in the management of their own affairs through their Student Government Association. As the concept of the liberal arts education has broadened, so the students themselves have reached out for more and better opportunities to express themselves.



Dormitories Grammer and Reid framed by one of the huge elm trees which dot the campus.

This brief picture of a college of the twentieth century shows an adventure in education which has made great progress through the years and which rests firmly on a strong academic foundation. With the help of all its alumnae and friends, Sweet Briar will continue its progress during its second half-century to prove over and over again the validity and soundness of the liberal arts education for young women.



The wide lawns and stately planting of Sweet Briar's grounds make it one of the country's most beautiful colleges

**Bulletin of
SWEET BRIAR, VIRGINIA
SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE**

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The Refectory is the center of the residential quadrangle.